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FM AMEMBASSY MASERU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3705
INFO RUEHOR/AMEMBASSY GABORONE IMMEDIATE 0477
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 4124

C O N F I D E N T I A L MASERU 000159

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA, DS/DSS/ODAC, S/CT, D, P, M, INR,
CA, AF/S; GABORONE FOR RSO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 5/30/2018

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: MASERU EAC CONVENES IN RESPONSE TO TRANSPORT CLASHES

REF: A) MASERU 158; B) MASERU 155; AND C) MASERU 144

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher M. Smith, P/DEP Officer, P/DEP,
Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) Charge convened the EAC on May 30 to consider Embassy Maseru's security posture and threat levels in light of recent violent clashes among police and individuals protesting the GOL's use of buses for public transportation (refs A and B). Representatives of all mission sections and agencies were in attendance (including MCC, Peace Corps, CDC, PEPFAR, CONS, A/MO, and P/DEP). Prior to the meeting, on May 29, the Post Security Office issued a security notice to all Mission personnel which informed employees of recent security-related events and advised strict adherence to Mission security policies already in place. The Consular section also issued a warden message with similar information to all registered U.S. citizens.

¶2. (U) On the morning of May 29, groups of individuals blocked taxis and government buses in several neighborhoods of Maseru from picking up or transporting passengers. According to eyewitnesses, some members of these protest groups, apparently in an effort to provide ad hoc support to taxi operators in an ongoing dispute (ref B), threw rocks, blocked roads, and forcibly removed passengers from vehicles. These actions led to a confrontation between protesters and police along a major transportation route into the capital. Shots were fired at the scene, and in several other neighborhoods. There were reports that some vehicles were damaged. A local press report indicated that several injured bus passengers were transported to Maseru's primary hospital. These events led to a de facto taxi strike during the course of May 29 which disrupted public transport. The previous day, May 28, a confrontation between taxi operators and security personnel guarding a government-operated bus in a Maseru suburb resulted in the shooting and serious injury of one of the protesters.

¶3. (C) These recent events come in the context of attacks by unknown gunmen with unknown motives against Lesotho police and military targets several weeks ago, which led the EAC to convene on May 16 (ref C).

¶4. (C) The EAC concluded that while the current situation does not warrant a change in post's already heightened general security posture, a review of contingency plans for a possible worsened situation over the coming week was in order. The leading taxi association has threatened to implement a nationwide strike o/a June 3. In the past, such strikes have severely disrupted transportation and spurred violence. The EAC approved a contingency planning memo presented by A/MO recommending heightened vigilance, an updated local staff phone tree, an increased emphasis on the use of radios by mission staff, and a liberal leave policy for nonessential staff should a strike or other action severely disrupt transportation or pose security risks for commuting. The EAC concluded that while country clearance procedures should not be changed, visitors

should be given a pre-arrival security briefing, delay travel when possible over the next three days, and be instructed to check with Embassy security staff before boarding their final flight to Maseru for an assessment on latest conditions. Peace Corps management has instructed volunteers not to travel to Maseru, and volunteers already in Maseru will be under curfew during evening hours.

15. (SBU) EAC members concurred that there are no signs of threats directed specifically at USG interests or U.S. citizens and that existing post security policies and actions taken (including issuance of a U.S. citizen warden notice and Mission security notice and a review of emergency procedures) are appropriate. Although no Amcits or Embassy employees have reported violence directly affecting them, several have reported arriving at the scene of a confrontation and/or angry mobs.

MURPHY